As the school year comes to an end, we are facing some drastic changes. Ultimately, they are unexpected changes that we were not prepared to encounter. The coronavirus pandemic has hit our parts of our country hard. The disease caused by this coronavirus is called COVID-19. It’s a respiratory infection, which means it attacks the lungs and affects a person’s breathing. Physicians have also reported evidence of damage to other organ systems as well including the heart, kidneys and liver. There is no definitive answer on the exact way to stop the virus from spreading, however social distancing and safely sheltering in place are some of the rules that have been established governing how we interact. They are believed to help lessen the spread by limiting social interactions and potentially have lifesaving effects if the protocols are followed.

The obvious harm that COVID-19 incurs is undeniable for some. Yet, as expected, there are difficulties with the new adjustments of sheltering in place and social distancing. It is definitely is a lifestyle change. Families are being asked to stay apart when they don’t reside in the same households. In addition, some people have no choice about their space. Others, particularly youth, may feel that they will not be affected or are taking a risk by continuing to “hang out” with friends. This thought process may be related to the fact that as scientist have dictated it takes a brain about 25 years to fully develop. The prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain which develops last houses the decision making process, controls reasoning and impulses, poor planning and judgement and is prevalent for more risky and impulsive behaviors. In addition, according to an article in Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, “huge burst of development happens during adolescence, and that burst can explain a lot of unpredictable—and sometimes risky—teen behavior.” All of this presents an array of challenges, including the added worry, stress, sadness and unrest associated with the pandemic.

In conjunction several communities have expressed a heighten awareness about the use of alcohol, marijuana and vaping amongst the youth. Because it attacks the lungs, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 could be an especially serious threat to those who smoke or who vape. In Rockland County you must be 21 years of age or older to purchase alcohol, marijuana and vaping. Yet, research informs us that alcohol, marijuana and the use of vapes are used largely by youth in social settings. Some social settings are widely being accessed on the Internet and/or the Internet is being used to make plans to physically meet other people. Pew Research reports “teens who are on constantly online are just as likely to meet with their friends offline.” Offline usually means in person. Moreover, as the entire country is now relying on the Internet as a source of communication, it’s difficult to monitor the use for youth.

With current rules in place, this may be dangerous. We have to be creative and develop ways engage the youth in a different way. A few suggests may include: teaching your young person to learn to cook a favorite meal; create a prototype or flush out an idea for a video game; learn to sew, crochet or knit; volunteer for one of the many organizations—local or national; reorganize; plan a realistic or dream staycation or vacation for the future from nuts to bolts. This may also be a perfect timing to for a serious conversation about the use of alcohol and substance use and/or addressing some of your concerns. As with many things, there are many ways to address this issue. Here are a few things you may want the youth to consider.

What are you thinking about before you use? Are you using this as a crutch? Is your use associated with something negative or something else? Consider making a plan for your day that does not allow for time to use? For more resources or information go to https://www.nyackschools.org/groups/22845/student_support_services_and_prevention/homepage.